1: Jenness--230-231 (1913-16) 1922 Copper Eskimo
116, 578, 522

"It cannot be said, however, that the Copper Eskimos are altogether lacking in mental alertness. Their daily conversation proves otherwise, their constant use of irony, for example, an irony that consists in saying exactly the opposite of what is meant. Thus when a native remarks to another aiyuittutin, 'You don't know how to do it,' he nearly always means 'You are clever, aren't you?' and when Avranna had outstripped the rest of us in his pursuit of two polar bears his wife proudly remarked, 'Avranna is slow, isn't he? A regular old woman.' Mental alertness is shown again in the quickness with which they adapt themselves to the customs and ways of the white man. They are extremely clever, too, in imitating the peculiarities and mannerisms of one another. My Puivlik companions were always mimicking the peculiar voice inflection of the Prince [231] Albert sound natives whom we had met. Nothing gives a native more pleasure, for instance, than to single out a rival's or an enemy's peculiarities and to hold them up to ridicule. Higilak was thus constantly ridiculing not only the Prince Albert sound woman Allikammik, but also Ikpakhuak's first wife, until the latter foisted her company on Ikpakhuak again and her presence made her rather too bitter a topic to joke about."

1: Jenness--234-235 (1913-16) 1922 Copper Eskimo
116, 522

"Nearly all the natives have a keen sense of humour. Aksiatak and Anauyak were unable to find the entrance to our house when first it was built. They peered through the window and saw Kaminggok inside, who told them to climb on to the roof and come down the stove-pipe. A little while afterwards the same native was grinning into a mirror and ejaculating, 'Who is this? What is his name? Isn't he handsome? and other remarks of a similar nature that kept his companions in a perpetual state of laughter. A cold snap overtook us once on Victoria island when some of our party had no proper shelters. Higilak, sitting comfortably inside her tent, told me to call out, 'Good luck to you people who have not tents.' An awkward dancer is sure to be the butt of the other natives, for, like all Eskimos, these people are excellent mimics. (1) Children especially [235] are fond of mimicking their elders, even their own parents. Practical jokes, while seldom indulged in, are usually taken with great good-humour. A native who had been sampling some of our foods was given a little strong horse-radish. The tears came into his eyes and he choked, but he swallowed it gamely nevertheless and grinned over it afterwards."

"1. Cf. Richardson, p. 211."

"The following affair is typical of their humour and mentality:

A man named Ulugshaq, an expert trader and notoriously bad character, possessing three wives, had just taken the drum and had stepped into the middle of the gathering, when another man by the name of Arshuk suddenly broke through the chorus and seized Ulugshaq by the shoulder, shouting in his face:

'Is it true that when I am out hunting you visit my wife behind my back?'

Ulugshaq laid the drum down and answered: 'We are not strangers to each other; get away from me and don't let us quarrel.'

He thereupon left the dance house and went home. Every house is regarded as being sacred: no one is ever attacked there. If a man attacks his enemy in his house he will himself be caught by vengeance some day when at home, suspecting nothing.

The people in the dance house thoroughly enjoyed the joke of Ulugshaq's reply, for both men were known as brawlers of uncertain temper, always ready to pick a quarrel. Arshuk followed Ulugshaq as far as his house and there took his sledge and drove it over to his own snow hut to demonstrate that he was not afraid of Ulugshaq. The affair was beginning to look serious, one that would probably end in bloodshed, until some neighbours interfered and pulled the sledge away from Arshuk's hut -- but no further than [19] that it stood midway between the dwellings of the two enemies. Further than that they dared not go for fear of Arshuk. Then suddenly, and unexpectedly, a little boy of seven or eight took a hand in the drama, without knowing what it was he was

actually doing, and dragged the sledge right back to Ulugshaq's hut. That a little child had done what none of the grown-ups had dared do -- that this little bit of a boy dared defy Arshuk before his very eyes, aroused such uproarious hilarity that Ulugshaq came out and made peace with his opponent. The whole affair petered out in laughter; they were good friends again and the dance in the snow hut was resumed where it had stopped, with Ulugshaq as soloist.

An episode like this can, better than many explanations, show how quickly a storm between two minds can rise and disperse again."

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ing-bags, singing in chorus between intervals of sleep, or mocking each other's voices. Our gaiety infected even the dignified Ikpuck, who improvised a comic song about my adventure with the wolf on the Coppermine River. No hardship could quench the cheerfulness of my companions. When morning dawned, and, breakfastless, we struggled ahead in the teeth of the gale, they launched many a jest at Icehouse, who, ill-prepared for such inclement weather, had enveloped her portly figure in a sleeping-robe, and waddled along with the rolling gait of a bear.

The snow melted slowly, for the brief summer was drawing to its close. The last of the flowers lay withered, butterflies and moths had vanished, and even the mosquitoes had ceased their endless buzzing. The days were shortening rapidly; darkness covered the land for three hours around midnight, and on still evenings ice was forming on the ponds and lakes. It was time to retrace our steps to our caches, take down the sleds, and seek out warmer clothing. But, before turning back, we could make one brief dash to the northward and try our fortunes in the hills behind Cape Baring.

Two days later, in the unmelted snow on the slope of a ridge, we came upon the fresh tracks of two polar bears. Here was game worth the hunting. We dropped our packs on the ridge-top in charge of Ice-

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diminished in number, and for two days none at all appeared. The natives, who had nothing to do except deposit their fish in caches as it dried, were lounging around their tents, enjoying the halcyon days of early summer—that week or fortnight, all too brief, when life seemed a glorious holiday. Food was abundant in their camp, and the air so warm that they could sleep in the open air, hardly molested as yet by the clouds of mosquitoes that would shortly darken the sky and attack every living creature, man and beast alike.

Humour is never lacking in an Eskimo community, especially during days of idleness. As the women were gossiping inside a tent, one of the men called out that a shoal had entered the weir. The gathering dispersed in an instant; for although theoretically food was shared in common, the family that gathered the largest store always fared better than the rest, and enjoyed greater prestige. The women, therefore, rushed for their spears and hurried down to the stream. But as they collected on the brink and eagerly scanned the empty water, loud guffaws from the men behind advised them of the hoax, and crestfallen, even amid their laughter, they slowly retreated to their tents again.

About six o'clock the next morning, while the camp still slept, I rose to light our breakfast fire. A woman appeared at the door of her tent, and after gazing tranquilly around, picked up her fish-spear and

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sauntered down to the weir. As I watched her she shouted, and wading into the water, plied her spear frantically to right and left. Instantly the camp was in an uproar. First the men dashed out, some naked, some half dressed, and, racing headlong to the stream, plunged into the water after her; but all the women loitered in the rear. Then shrieks of laughter mingled with the loud shouts and angry ejaculations of the men; the weir was empty, and the women had taken their revenge.

There was an elderly medicine-man in this camp, one whom we had nicknamed Socrates on account of his snub nose and unusual ugliness. He was a good-natured fellow, but rather dull-witted, and of no great authority among his countrymen because his guardian spirits were credited with little power. He thought fit to hold a séance during our visit, and, from sheer malice, as I believe, directed his utterances against Patsy and myself. Amid much unintelligible nonsense, he alluded to Patsy as the boy whose legs were too long, and to myself as the man who was frightening away the fish by dipping an iron cup into the water, iron, as every one knew, being distasteful to the salmon. But, unfortunately for his credit, the largest shoal of the season unexpectedly entered the weir within two hours of his séance, and the Eskimos, who attributed it to myself in some way, laughed at their seer, who perforce concealed his discomfiture under a foolish smile.